



are open to change. This is one, New Year is another. The idea of the threshold is important to liminality but thresholds do not just occur in time. They can also be found in places and in activities. Liminal spaces are a place between places, in which new things (or surprising and unusual things) are possible. Because of this uncertainty, these liminal spaces can seem rather creepy or allow behaviours that would be unacceptable elsewhere: hotels, corridors, airports, empty buildings, Las Vegas, the wood between the worlds in the Narnia books.

Then there are the liminal activities – festivals, carnivals, group travels such as pilgrimages or sports tours, even such extreme things as revolutions. In these liminal activities normal behaviour can be set aside and a spirit of novelty, even anarchy, is unleashed. You will have very liminal thought.

Sometimes the three liminalities – time, places and activities – collide and reinforce each other. A liminal plant like the mistletoe (it grows halfway up a tree and is between earth and sky) can be placed in a liminal space (a doorway) at a liminal time of year (Christmas) to allow behaviour that might not normally be considered (the chance to kiss someone else).

Liminality is a concept that we might not know directly, but it is a concept that is firmly established in our culture and in very many others. In-betweenness seems to be very important to us.

Why do I like it? Because it is a state of becoming. It is a moment when the old order is questioned and can be overcome. And so it offers hope to us all, maybe even redemption. Here we are at a liminal moment. The start of a new academic year. A moment when everything is up for grabs. When a path can be changed and an opportunity seized. That is true for all of us in the room – it is especially true for those making a bigger transition. Those just joining the school, those embarking on a year when the GCSE courses will start, those about to enter the Sixth Form, those looking to finish their time at the school with a brilliant performance that will take them to a university or course of their choice – they face a moment of heightened liminality. It is as true for staff, and for me, as it is for pupils.

Liminality shimmers at this time of year. Alternatives hover before us. Soon the gates will shut a little and the opportunities recede if we decide to return to the old way of being rather than progressing on to the new.

But now, at this magical time of year, we have a fresh start, a new dawn, a first step before us. No wonder it is my favourite time of year. This is a golden moment.